



## SUCCESS STORY

### Empowered Guards Protect the Forests

**Communities engaged to see natural resources as shared common good**



Amadou Tijane Diallo (center) discusses local conventions protecting the Ouly forest reserve near Koussanar in southern Senegal with Boubou Diallo (left) and Konaté Deme (right), both of Saré Boubon village.

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These herders, handpicked by their communities in southeast Senegal, are on the frontline -- safeguarding their forests and fields from fires and unwanted livestock, and from people chopping down protected trees. As newly trained forest guards in the Koussanar area, they police their communal lands.

The guards play a crucial role in the success of USAID’s Nature, Wealth, and Power concept, based on USAID’s experience throughout Africa over the last 20 years. The approach calls for environmentally-sound management of natural areas (Nature) by transferring management responsibility to local governments (Power) and creating wealth through sustainable use of local, natural products (Wealth).

Koussanar, a 2,000-person town 30 miles west of the regional capital, Tambacounda, is a case in point. Here, dozens of groups harvest for export karaya gum, baobab fruit, jujube, and a grain called fonio, all lucrative alternatives to traditional cash crops of peanuts and cotton. Brought together by USAID-paid local facilitators, communities work with local administrative and national forest department officials to establish rules governing the use of the forested areas, and set up fines for damaging vines and trees or setting bushfires.

Project staff trained 64 men chosen by their local development committees in 31 villages in the Koussanar area – and 40 more from rural communities around Malème Niani – as forest guards to enforce the local forest code, drafted with the help of the USAID project’s team.

Koussanar is one of 24 communities where USAID has worked alongside residents and authorities to draft local conventions on resource use. Koussanar’s local officials are convinced of the need to plan carefully for future forest products. “Before the arrival of this USAID project, it was as if the people had not taken part at all in preserving their natural resources,” said Diambar Ba, president of Koussanar’s rural council environment committee.